

19 February 1987

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 2

GORBY WARMS TO ISRAEL

Soviet leader plans new role in Mideast

SOVIET leader Mikhail Gorbachev has told his Arab allies he plans to reestablish diplomatic ties with Israel and play a major role in a planned international peace conference on the Mideast, The Post has learned.

The Soviet Union's new strategy was revealed in secret diplomatic communications intercepted by U.S. and Israeli intelligence agents.

By NILES J. LAMAR
and URI DAN

The messages to Arab allies, including Algeria, Syria and Libya, say flatly that Gorbachev's game-

plan is aimed at creating a key role for him in the Mideast peace process.

News of the Soviets' new diplomatic offensive came as President Reagan clashed with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir over the peace conference issue during a White House meeting.

The administration generally supports the conference idea, but Shamir is bitterly against it.

In the intercepted messages, Gorbachev said he's ready to relax further Jewish emigration laws in a bid to mend diplomatic fences with Israel.

But intelligence

analysts think he's unlikely to go as far as Israel and the Reagan administration want him to.

The changes, they say, may involve only the reunification of Jewish families and not significantly increase emigration.

Gorbachev also made it clear that the Soviets want to attend any international conference on Mideast peace and play a role in negotiating the issue of Palestinian autonomy.

At the White House yesterday, Reagan said he was ready to pursue "any reasonable means, including an international conference" to achieve the goal of direct negotiations between Israel and its neighbors.

But sources said Shamir privately warned him that the Soviets likely will press Israel to withdraw to its pre-1967 borders.

He said that would mean giving back to Syria the strategic Golan Heights — a move certain to weaken Israeli defenses.

Just how the Soviets' Arab allies will react to the new diplomatic strategy on Israel is unclear.

But intelligence experts point out that Moscow already is running into trouble with some of them, especially Libya.

They confirmed yesterday that the nine members of the Libyan underground recently executed in public were killed because they had plotted to bomb a Soviet facility in Benghazi.

Libyan leader Moammar Khadafy ordered the executions.